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ABSTRACT

This curriculum and discussion guide explains how teachers can include written words in the on-going activities of a preschool classroom. Practical suggestions are given, and actual classroom incidents are used to illustrate how they can be implemented. (Author)

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USING READING EVERYDAY IN THE PRESCHOOL: A CURRICULUM GUIDE AND DISCUSSION FOR TEACHERS

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July, 1977

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INTRODUCTION

Many preschool teachers are interested in providing opportunities for young children to make discoveries about reading, but they wish to avoid formal instruction in reading. They know that young children are curious about almost everything in their environment, and that their curiosity and interest would easily extend to written words if these could be made available in a natural way.

But many teachers are not quite sure how to build written words into the everyday environment of a preschool classroom. How can a teacher make the acquisition of knowledge about written words as natural and commonplace as the acquisition of knowledge about blocks, clay, paint, sand, water, etc? In other words, how does a teacher of young children create a "literate environment [1]" in which written words play a useful role in children's lives?

In this curriculum guide, teachers will find a discussion of the use of written words in connection with ordinary classroom procedures and situations. These classroom procedures and situations provide meaningful opportunities for children to learn about written words. Because the contexts in which the words are used provide very substantial cues to what the words say, even young children learn to "read" many words quickly and easily. In addition, because the situations and procedures are part of everyday classroom life, children have repeated access to the words over a very long period of time. Therefore, children can explore the words in their own good time for as long as they wish. They can also make discoveries about words (e.g. "John's

[1]This term is one coined by Jenny Simons, a nursery school teacher-educator from Austrailia.

name starts with the same letter as mine!" or "I see the word 'time' in six places on our schedule!"). In addition, children can 'play' with the words (for example, during an activity period, one child might say to another, "Let's take all of the names out of the attendance chart and then put them all in again!" or "Let's look around the room and see how many words start with 's'").

The ideas discussed in this guide deal with only one aspect of the total "literate environment" that can be made available to young children. Teachers who are interested in additional aspects of such environments may wish to consult two other guides in this series: (1) Using Symbolic Props in Play, and (2) Using Teacher-Made Reading Materials in the Preschool.

SETTING LIMITS

General Limits

Most teachers establish a few general limits for their classrooms. It may be helpful to post these limits on the classroom walls to serve as reminders to the children. For example, a sign which says, "Wear a Smock When Painting" could be placed in the art area, or a "Quiet Please" sign could be placed in the library area. When children in various areas forget to follow a limit, the teacher could remind them of the limit and then point out that the sign has the limit written on it. Signs can be illustrated so that even very young children can "read" what they say.

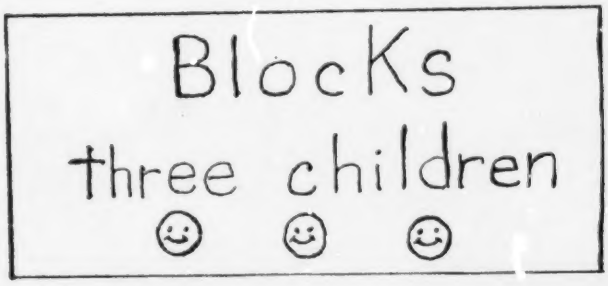
Specific Limits

An ongoing concern in many classrooms is the number of children present in a given area of the room at one time. In the block area, for example, too many children can lead to fighting over possession of blocks. The art area is another potential battleground. Spilled paint tins and anguished cries over too little playdough interfere with constructive child activity.

One way to establish limits in terms of numbers of children in different areas of the room is to post signs which state the number of children allowed in each area. These signs might be worded in a number of different ways but should basically indicate that "X number of children" can be in the area at a given time. You may find it useful to make the number changeable. Depending on the materials you have set out in the art area on a given day, for example, you may want to vary the number of children.

Signs can be attached to the wall of an area, or to a shelving unit. They can be illustrated with pictures. For example, if three people can

play at one time in a dramatic play area, the sign might say,"Three Children", and pictures of three children's faces might be glued onto it. A similar sign in an art area designed to accommodate four children, might have four pictures of children's faces glued to it. Children who cannot read the words can count the faces, or if they cannot count, they can match the pictures with the children in the area.



Setting Limits-Anecdotes from Teachers

1. Using signs for particular areas of our classroom helped to remind the children of some of our basic rules, and also provided natural reading experiences in our classroom. I posted signs in various areas such as "Quiet Please" in the library corner and "Are you wearing a smock?" near the painting easel. Because our loft required teacher supervision, we also posted the signs "open" and "closed" so that the children would become exposed to these words and understand when they could use the loft. One ironic situation developed when two of the children in the library corner were arguing in loud voices about what the sign over the books ("Quiet, Please") "said". It was amusing when the two girls finally discovered what the sign really did "say"!

2. I posted signs in several areas of the room to indicate the number of children who could occupy the area at any one time. I was amazed at how quickly the children could read what the signs said.

The greatest difficulty arose in settling disputes about who entered the area last, thus exceeding the limit. Usually, I would talk the situation over with the children and arrive at some conclusion about who had indeed been the last child to enter the area. Then, I would ask the children remaining in the area to let this child know when there was space for him or her in the area. If no spaces opened up on this day, then the first turn the next day went to this child.

In some areas, such as water and sand play or the typewriter, we used a list of names to make sure turns were equally distributed. Children who wanted turns for the day signed their names on a list, or told the teacher to write it on the list. As a child used his or her turn, the name was crossed

off. The list was posted on the wall of the area, or taped to the table. The child finishing a turn was asked to go tell the child whose name appeared next that a place was now available.

Use of the name list provided an excellent opportunity for children to learn to recognize their own and other children's names. When a child did not know whose name appeared next, he or she simply asked the teacher or another child, "Whose name is that?"

STORING MATERIALS

Labeling Personal Spaces

In most classrooms there are places where individual children can store personal belongings. Coats, hats, boots, etc. are often stored in individual cubbies. Cubbies can be labeled with children's names. These labels provide excellent opportunities for children to learn to recognize their own names, and the names of friends.

In some classrooms, children have a personal drawer, box, or shelf in addition to a cubbie. Matherials such as crayons, scissors, paper, etc. are stored in these places. Again, if children's names are written on these containers, an excellent reading experience can be provided.

Another good idea for a personal space in a classroom is a "picture place." This is a wall space, or a space on the back or side of a shelving unit where a child can display art pictures. Each child's place is labeled with his or her name, and the child can decide which picture is to be displayed there, and when it should be replaced by another.

Labeling Where Things Belong

Materials in the classroom that are used by all of the children usually have a specific storage place. It is helpful to label materials and shelves so that children can put things back where they belong.

One technique for indicating correct storage space is to code the particular kind of material (games or whatever) with a color and to put swatches of this color on the shelves where these games are to be stored. If you want all of the puzzles to be stored on the first shelf, for example, you might put a piece of blue tape on each puzzle as well as on the shelf.

The children can then match the colors when it is time for them to return things to the shelf.

Shapes can be effectively used for giving clues as to where things should be stored. This works particularly well in the block area. Blocks are often one of the last things that children pick up when it comes to clean-up time. Clearly marking the shelves with the different shapes of the blocks can facilitate this process.

Shapes can also be helpful in the art area. On the art shelves you might attach pictures of the various things to be stored, or draw clear outlines of the various containers, tools, etc. These can be carefully attached to the shelves so that materials designated can be easily stored in the given amount of space.

In addition to using colors and shapes, all storage space can be clearly labeled with words. Even if the children are not yet reading words, words can be a part of their everyday experience. This is how they learn to read. You can reinforce the utility of words by pointing to the various labels when you say the words. You might say, for example, "Let's put this puzzle here on the shelf where it says 'puzzles'", as you point to the label.

You may well be using coffee cans, juice cans,etc. for storing art materials or small pieces to games. You can label all of these containers, too. You may choose to leave the container uncovered in which case the child can see the original words. Or if you do cover the container be sure to attach a label indicating the contents of the can. Whether the words are on containers in the dramatic play area, on "junk" collage material, or containers you store things in, children can learn a great deal from exposure to them.

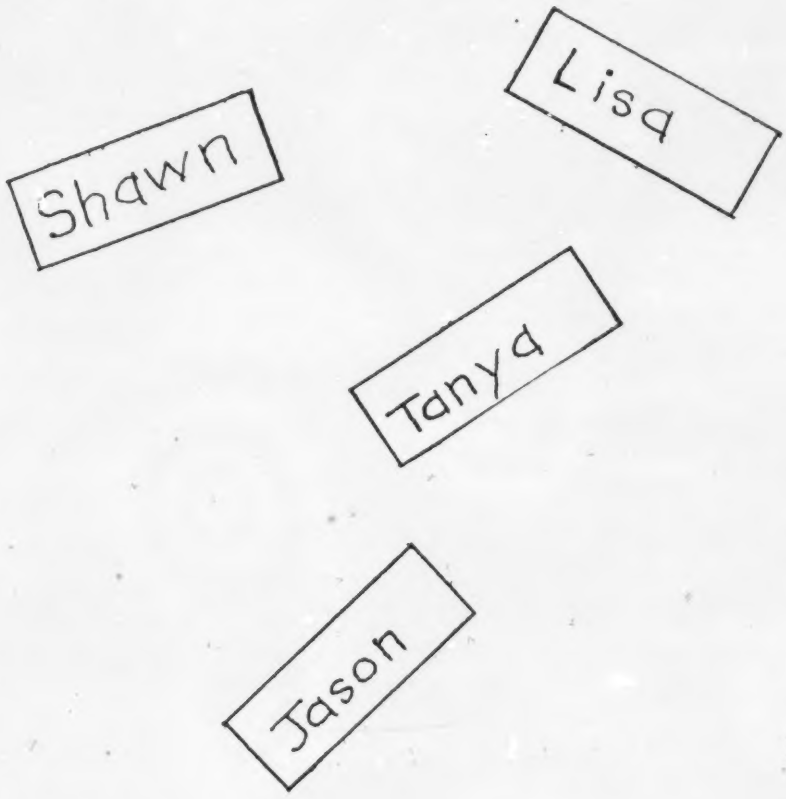
Storing Materials-Anecdotes from Teachers

1. We store our magic markers in an uncovered Maxwell House Coffee can. On one occasion, I had placed the coffee can and some drawing paper on a small table. Four or five children sat down at the table and started to draw pictures. But one girl took the coffee can itself and started to diligently copy the words on it! It took quite awhile for her to complete this task because she had to look at the letter on the can, patiently and steadily copy the letter onto her paper, look back at the can, remember her place and find the next letter, copy it, etc. I was surprised at her patience and degree of concentration. In the meantime, other children wanted to use the magic markers in the coffee can. When she refused to let them, I at first assumed that she did not want to share the markers with the other children. It was only when I approached the table that I realized that her reason for not sharing the markers was that each time a child took one out of the can, she lost her place in copying!

2. One day, I noticed one of the younger boys in my class was lingering much longer than usual at his cubby first thing in the morning. I went to check on him, thinking he might be ill, or be having a difficult time separating from his mother. However, when I went to his cubby, I found him looking at his name which was printed on a piece of paper attached to his cubby. Then he looked at the name on the cubby next to his, and then at the name on the cubby next to it. "Whose name is that?", he asked. I told him whose name it was. "Whose is this one?" he asked again. He inquired about two other names, and then went off into the classroom, to the art area.

I do not know what prompted his interest in the name tags. Perhaps he wanted to know where a friend's cubby was located, or perhaps he had

become interested in trying to figure out what words say. In any event, the availability of the labels provided a good opportunity for this child to explore written words.



ROUTINE DAILY ACTIVITIES

Daily Schedule

Most teachers follow a daily schedule. Children are often interested in the order of the activities for the day, and they sometimes ask questions about it: "When is snack?" "When do we have storytime?" "When will my mother come?"

A teacher can write out the daily schedule on a large piece of paper, and post it at the children's eye-level. Then, when questions arise, the teacher can refer to the written daily schedule. If such a chart is illustrated like the one shown below, children can soon consult the chart on their own to obtain information. And, it won't take long for many children to learn to "read" the words on the "daily schedule" chart. The pictures, as well as the child's own knowledge of the order of daily events, serve as clues for what the words say.

Daily Attendance

In most classrooms, a record of daily attendance must be made. Children can learn a great deal if they are allowed to assume responsibility for this task.

One plan might be to have a "name board" containing a peg for each child with a name tag attached. At the beginning of the year, the children could select their name tag each morning, and then wear it. Name tags left on the pegs would indicate to the teacher at a glance who was absent on a particular day. This attendance-taking procedure not only helps the teacher in learning each child's name quickly, but helps children learn to recognize their own names and the names of their classmates. Letting each child decorate his or her name tag will aid recognition, and will make the tag more personal to the child.

After a few weeks, the children might select their name tags each morning and then place them in a designated spot rather than wear them (in a box or an envelope attached to the wall).

A large name chart rather than name tags might be used for taking attendance. The chart might look like the one shown below:

Attendance Chart						
	M	T	W	Th	F	
Cathy						
Tim						
Jason						
Lisa						
Diane						
James						
Charles						
Ann						
Sandra						
Maria						
Pam						
Shawn						

The teacher could use the chart during a morning meeting or circle time. Children are asked to look around and see who is absent. Then a child is asked to mark an 'X' in the boxes across from names of those children who are absent. Questions such as "What letter would Mary's name begin with?" could be used to help the child find the correct names.

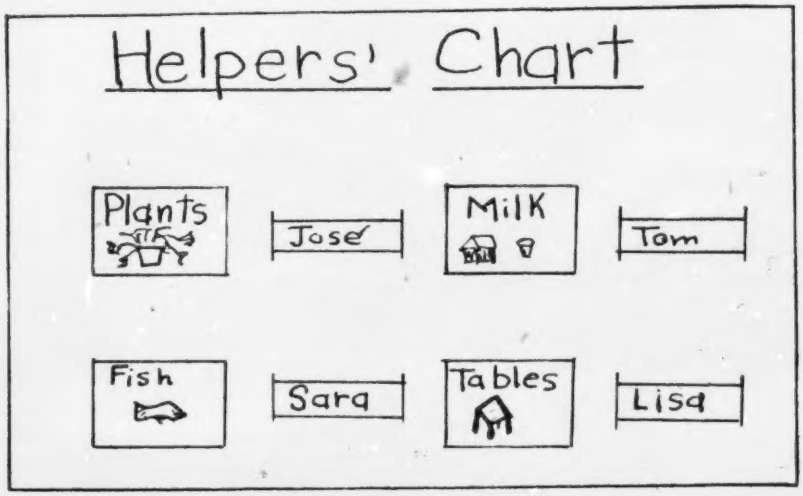
This kind of chart can also be posted on the wall of the classroom making it possible for children to mark themselves present. Children will find this chart more difficult to use than the name tag chart we talked about earlier. Therefore, it might work best to use it with older preschool or kindergarten groups, or to use it near the end of the year. (It's a good idea to change the attendance-taking procedure every two or three months in order to expose children to different experiences).

Because the chart is "used up" in a week, a new one must be made every week. Children can be involved in making each new chart. During the morning activity-period, for example, children could write their own names on the chart. Some child might also be interested in writing the letters to label the days. Not all children will be interested in writing their names on the chart each week, but some will probably be interested in writing their own.

This type of name chart can become more permanent by covering it with clear contact paper. The children can use a crayon to mark themselves present. At the end of the week, the crayon marks can be wiped off with a damp cloth. A contact-covered chart has the advantage also of allowing a child who marks an "X" in an incorrect box to correct it easily with the damp cloth.

Jobs ("Helping Hands")

Assigning daily "duties" can be a big help in the classroom. Children are usually very anxious to help out, especially when certain tasks are designated as special duties. Some of the things which would fall into this category would be cleaning specific areas of the room, distributing milk at snack time, feeding animals, watering plants, etc. Whatever the particular "duties"are in your classroom, you could make a chart with these duties listed. Each day the children who volunteer for these tasks could either write their names or place a card with their name in a pocket in the chart. A felt board might work well for this as the names will change daily.



Snack

Every teacher organizes snack time in a manner which suits his or her class. Some of you may have snack on an ongoing basis, for example, while others may set a specific time aside.

One suggestion for incorporating reading into snack time is to post a sign each day with the menu for snack. This can be done with either method of serving snack. If you have a relatively limited selection of snack foods you might have a set of menus made up and it could be one child's duty to locate the correct menu for the day and post it somewhere in the room. If your snacks vary daily you might always have materials available in the art area to make a different menu for each day.

Some teachers feel that particular children need to be assigned to specific tables for snack. If you feel this would work well in your classroom, you might make up a list of children for each table and set these on the tables. Another idea would be to have the children make name cards which you could then place on the tables, or perhaps names taped to the back of the chairs would work well for you. Then children can locate their names and sit at their special place.

Lunch

Opportunities for using written words in connection with lunch will vary a great deal depending on the particular classroom. If there is a hot lunch program, you could post a daily menu, as was suggested with the daily snack.

Food containers with words on them are often around at mealtime. If you eat lunch with the children you could use this opportunity to help them read some of these words. Perhaps you could have the children save milk containers, cookie wrappers, yogurt containers, etc. so that they might be used in the art area or the dramatic play area.

Rest Period

Teachers differ in their opinions of whether all children should be made to "rest" during rest period. Certainly every child is different and

some children truly do need a nap each day. It seems just as certain, however, that other children do not need a nap. Rest period is an ideal time to offer these children reading materials (books, games, etc.) as an alternative.

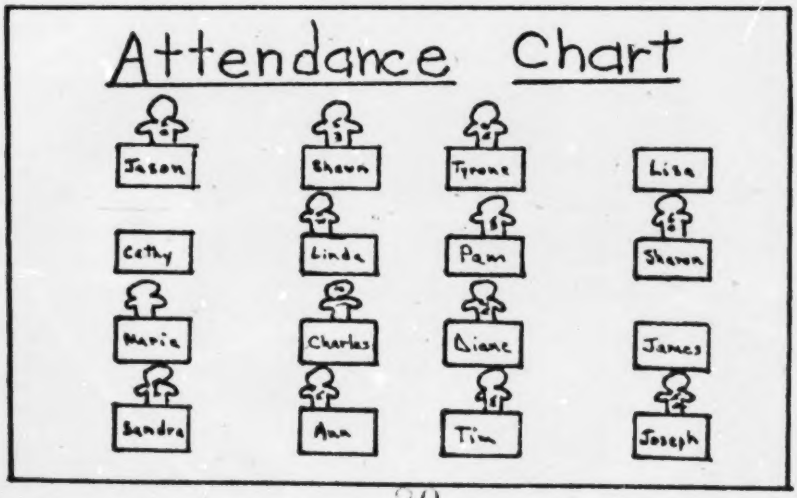
You will probably want to enforce some rules such as having only quiet activities during rest periods, or restricting the use of materials to the child's cot. To provide for children who do want to sleep you will want to divide the room in such a way as to provide a darkened area for the napping children.

Some of the reading related activities you could make available to children during rest period might be such things as books to read, pencil and paper to write with, word and/or letter games that can be played alone, puzzles, etc. To avoid squabbles you will need to set clear limits at the beginning of each rest period about who will use what activities.

Labeling cots (mats or blankets) with each child's name provides another opportunity for the child to recognize his or her own name.

Routine Daily Activities-Anecdotes from Teachers

1. The attendance chart we made for our Kindergarten classroom not only reduced the daily interruption of activities when our secretary came in to take the roll, but provided a reading experience for the children as well. I took a large sheet of poster board and attached individual pockets with each child's name. I then gave each child a cut-out paper doll. Each child wrote his or her name on the doll and used crayons to decorate it so that it resembled him/herself. The paper dolls were kept in a box next to the attendance chart. Upon arrival each morning, each child had to sort through the box of paper dolls to find his or her name and place it in the corresponding pocket. The secretary only needed to observe the empty pockets when she came in to take attendance. This daily activity not only helped the children to recognize their own names, but also aided them in reading the names of other children in the class. This became apparent when, on several occasions, I asked the children during circle time to tell me the names of the children who were absent that day. I was surprised when several of the children, instead of looking around the circle to determine the children who were absent that day, immediately consulted the attendance chart and read the names of the children who had empty pockets.



2. An interesting reading experience occurs in my class each time ice cream is served for dessert at lunch time. The cartons are delivered to my classroom wrapped in aluminum foil to keep them cold. Without my prompting, several of the children always remove the aluminum foil after the ice cream is dished out in order to "read" the label. At first, the children would ask me what the label "said". Now, some of the children recognize some of the different flavors of ice cream and will tell me or a classmate, "That says 'chocolate'" or "This says 'strawberry'". On one occasion, pecan ice cream was served. A few days prior to this, our class had pistachio ice cream. Two of the children recognized that both flavors began with the same letter, which started an impromptu discussion at our small lunch table of foods that begin with the letter 'p'.

3. We had always kept a series of signs in our classroom to reinforce our daily schedule ("It's Snack Time, It's Clean-Up Time", etc). On a rotating basis, one child would change the signs each time the class moved from activity to activity. As the end of the year approached us, I observed that most of our wall space was filled by the children's art work and other signs. Wanting to unclutter some of our walls in the room, I noticed that most of the children could read the signs of our daily schedule. For a change of pace, I decided to make these signs into a book entitled "Our Daily Schedule" and placed it in the library corner with our other books. Because the children are familiar with the signs, it is a book that most of them can read and is an aid in developing their conceptions of time. It is also a quick reference for them in noting "how many activities come after snack time" or "what comes after rest time".

TRANSITIONS AND WAITING TIMES

Waiting

Although it's a good idea to minimize the amount of time that preschoolers must spend waiting, it seems that "waiting times" arise now and then. It's a good idea for teachers to make productive use of this time.

If lines are necessary, this time can be made more enjoyable by playing games. If the children are joining the line one by one (e.g. to go outside) you want to do something which a preschooler can join in at any time and still become a part of the activity. A favorite song with lots of verses might be a good technique.

If all of the children are gathered and are waiting (perhaps for a special event) you might try doing something such as a guessing game or perhaps have the children tell a group story. You could start the story off with a few suggestive lines and then go through the group letting each child add a few sentences to the story. You might also fill this time with activities such as finger plays, tongue twisters, or songs.

Transitions

A transition is the change from one activity to the next, e.g. snack to outdoor play, or indoor activity time to story time. Sometimes, these changes can be eased by using various techniques.

When it comes time for the children to move from a group meeting to activities, for example, you might say something like, "Everyone whose name begins with "T" can go and choose an activity," or "Anyone whose name rhymes with "hill" can leave the meeting and get ready to go outside."

You might also suggest that the children move from one activity to another in a particular manner. You could ask everyone whose name begins with

the same sound as Peter's name to walk lightly like a mouse or everyone whose name has an "a" in it to hop like a kangaroo, etc.

Sometimes it is helpful to sing a song during clean-up, which itself serves as a transition. "This is the Way We Clean Our Room", sung to the tune of "The Mulberry Bush" works well.

Transitions and Waiting Times-Anecdotes from Teachers

1. To prevent the children in my kindergarten classroom from becoming restless or bored during a short "waiting" or transition period, I often play a phonics circle game with them called "I'm Going on a Picnic". I usually start the game by stating, "I'm going on a picnic and I'm bringing an apple." The child next to me states, "I'm going on a picnic and I'm bringing a banana (or a similar word that begins with the letter "b"). The game continues in the circle with each child stating what he or she will bring following the progression of the alphabet. The game can produce some interesting and amusing variations, especially if the words used are not limited to foods (e.g. I'm going on a picnic and I'm bringing an ape). For further variation the phrase "In Grandmother's Attic I Found. . ." can be substituted for "I'm Going on a Picnic. . .", applying the same rules as above. The game not only reinforces the concept of beginning sounds, but it can be stopped and started again at any point. It is a good waiting or transition game because children can join in at any time.

2. The team of preschool teachers I taught with was firmly committed to giving the children as much freedom to determine their activities as possible. At the beginning of the year, we decided to start each day with a group meeting and to then let the children go to whatever area they wished from there. We quickly discovered that the great majority of the children all went to one or two areas. The areas they chose changed from day to day but the fact that the class tended to gravitate to certain areas of the room together was consistant.

Our teaching team thus faced the dilemma of how to maintain our principle of free choice while solving our problem of overcrowding in one or two areas.

We devised the following plan which worked smoothly for the rest of the year. At the end of meeting time each morning we took out a felt board on which we had listed each activity area across the top with a picture. Each child would take a piece of felt with his or her name on it. We would then start out by saying something like "Who would like to start out in the block area?" The children would hand us their names to be put on the board as we called out the area they wanted to go to. This also served as a good opportunity to describe what particular activities were available that day in each area.

Frequently by the time we finished going through the different areas there was an even spread of names in the different areas. It seems that the simple process of asking the children to really think about where they would like to go in the room avoided mass migrations. When too many children requested one area we solved the problem quickly by saying that the first group of children could stay there for X amount of time and then they would switch. In this way we avoided conflicts before they arose.

Other than this we set no time limits on the areas. After getting a good start at an even distribution, the rest of the morning usually flowed very smoothly.

3. The children in my kindergarten class would always crowd around the door instead of forming a line when it was dismissal time or time for outdoor play. My repeated verbal attempts to instruct them to form a line failed most of the time and was a daily waste of time and energy. In order to alleviate this problem, I taped 26 large circles to the floor in a line near the door, labeling each one with a letter of the alphabet. Now when it is time for the children to line up near the door, I play a variety of reading games

with the children, using the alphabet circles. Sometimes, I will simply state, "Terry, go stand on the letter 'B'", or "James, stand on the letter that your name begins with." Other times, I might ask a child to stand on the letter that the word 'cat' begins with or to stand on the "first letter of the alphabet". Some of the children will understand my instructions when I ask them to "stand on the letter that comes after 'D'". The children enjoy playing these short reading and phonics games, and at the same time, the crowd of children around the door is eliminated.